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ABSTRACT

This paper describes four journalism courses designed to develop students' visual sense and then channel that sense into the field of advertising. "Visual Communication" is a basic course in the elements of design which attempts to demonstrate to students that there are rules and order which comprise good design. "Publication Production and Design" is a graphic arts course which utilizes a laboratory with a wide range of relatively sophisticated equipment. The course begins with a theoretical discussion of design, and then examines practical applications in the areas of photography, graphics, film, and television. The subject covered in greatest depth in this course is typography. "Introduction to Advertising" is designed to provide basic information on the theory and practice of advertising throughout the media. Like the other courses, it is more of an attempt to develop taste than to develop skill. "Advertising Copywriting: Print" is a course in writing and visualizing advertising copy for the print media. Practical experience is gained by the students in regulation copywriting and layout exercises which are evaluated and criticized in laboratory sessions. (TS)

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# THE TEACHING OF GRAPHICS AND DESIGN

by

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Those of us who are involved in the teaching of graphics and design have entered the profession through a number of different doors. Like many of my colleagues, I was a printer and learned the trade through the equivalent of an apprenticeship program. I worked my way through high school and part way through college as a compositor in a hot metal shop. In college I eventually switched to advertising sales to increase my earnings. My salesmanship was based on the ability to deliver a complete package to my clients which included layout and design as well as copywriting.

This brief autobiographical material is an attempt to explain some of my original assumptions and the manner in which I have had to change them in the course of teaching. Five years ago I was a firm believer that knowledge of the actual processes of the graphic arts field was power. The first college course which I taught in the area was called "Graphic Arts Production"--a course geared for advertising and public relations majors. Its basic purpose was to bring students to an understanding of the various production processes involved in graphics. This course produced some good mechanics, but not enough really good designers.

The reason for this gap between academic performance and professional ability lay, I believe, in some erroneous assumptions that I had made. As a trained artisan, I was willing to attribute my own success to these skills. What I failed to understand at that time was that there had been other training in my own background that had been equally important. My undergraduate degree

had been in English and American Literature, a field not in itself wholly compatible with graphic design. More than this specialty, however, had been the rather traditional liberal arts education which I had received. Along with literature, I was exposed to art, architecture, and photography as well as many other diverse disciplines. This is all involved in what my friend, Glenn Hanson, of the University of Illinois calls the development of taste.

One of the problems that we face in Journalism Schools today is the swing on the part of our institutions away from the more traditional aspects of liberal arts education. In our attempt to hold students in our universities, we have removed many of the traditional "taste developing" requirements from our courses of study. This means that we can assume no formal training on the part of our students in the visual arts. We must develop a feel and taste for good design within our own curricula.

Ideally we could assume that our students would absorb the best from the visual arts which they encounter in the course of their lives. In fact, we cannot count on this. To make matters worse, much of the material to which our students are exposed is pure trash. This is especially true, unfortunately, in the field of advertising. My own personal proof of this is the dismal "Starch Scores" accumulated by so much print advertising. It is a rare piece of advertising that scores higher than 50% in the Starch "noted" category. In other words, a lot of print advertising is so poorly executed that less than half of the people exposed to it will even see it.

Utilizing these experiences and observations, I have been involved in extensive curriculum development for the past several years in an attempt to find better methods of teaching graphic design. This is the long way around to explain to you the system which I now use to teach in this area. For journalism students who are concentrating in advertising my university now requires a series of four courses to develop visual sense and then channel that sense into the field of advertising. These courses are titled: "Visual Communications", "Publication Production and Design" (A new name for Layout and Typography), "Introduction to Advertising", and "Advertising Copywriting: Print". Let me give you a brief explanation of these courses and share with you some thoughts on how they fit into the basic philosophy which I have been attempting to explain.

The cornerstone of the teaching of Graphics and Design is Visual Communications, a course in non verbal communications in the mass media which is billed in the undergraduate catalog as an "introduction to the nature and functions of visuals in the mass media" which includes an examination or the mechanics and uses of visual techniques. I might add here that this is not a course of my own invention, but one adapted from the pioneering work of Smitty Schuneman at the University of Minnesota.

Visual Communications is a basic course in the elements of design which attempts to demonstrate to the students that there are rules and order which comprise good design. Some would talk about aesthetics, but I hesitate to use the term since art does give way to the practical considerations of the mass media. VisCom,

as it is known, explores the similarities and differences in design in photography, graphics, film, and television. To some extent design is controlled by the framing element of the particular medium, but certain principles can be seen that cut across the lines of the media. The opening of the course is an exploration of visual symbols followed by forays into the basics of line, shape, form, and texture, the design of space, visual organization, the use of color, and the psychology of vision.

While the course is not rigid, it does stress that there are certain basic "rules" of design which must be understood both by the artist and the consumer. The ability to be a designer stems from the ability to use certain basic rules effectively. Only when the rules are understood is it then possible to break them and become a true artist. It is my basic premise that someone with minimal pure artistic sense can become more than an adequate designer by the understanding and application of basic rules. This premise has often brought me in conflict with members of the art department faculty who are concerned with less practical results. What we have here is art for communication rather than art for art's sake.

After the more or less theoretical opening of the course, practical applications are studied in photography, graphics, film, and television. In the area of graphics we look specifically at types of illustrations, typography, and the adaptation of abstract design principles to the specific boundaries found in advertising, newspapers, and magazines. Initial testing concerns itself only with the understanding of the reading material. The students'

grasp of basic principles is evaluated through three projects which involve the taking of 35mm color slides. Each slide (and there are 15 in all) must demonstrate a specific principle of design.

Success in a course of this type is hard to define. From an administrative standpoint it is successful since enrollments have increased steadily to the point of being heavy. In terms of the individual students, success can probably be measured in terms of progress. Few of the students who enter the course have any knowledge of design. At the end of ten weeks, however, most have shown a steadily increasing awareness of design and an ability to apply principles. Roughly two thirds of the students, though, will never take an advanced course in this area since their college majors do not require this type of work. About one third, however, are communications majors, more than half of them in journalism. For them VisCom is an entry to advanced work.

The second course in the series of four is "Publication Production and Design". This is a graphic arts course in every sense of the word and utilizes a laboratory with a wide range of relatively sophisticated equipment. Since my university teaches on 10 week quarters, the principles taught in the prerequisite VisCom course are important. The basics need only be reviewed in teaching graphic arts. This course is concerned with the understanding and use of the basic tools of the graphics industry and therefore is a much more practical course in many ways.

The area covered in greatest depth in this course is typography, perhaps the most misunderstood of all of the components in graphic

arts education. Studied in detail are type design, measurement, composition, and copyfitting. What is learned about type is then placed in perspective with the study of illustrations (which includes cropping and scaling), and the overall design of advertising, brochures, and magazines (newspaper layout is covered in depth in the newspaper editing class). Every student must integrate learned design principles with procedures learned by designing an advertisement and a magazine from material provided and an original brochure. This is the kind of nuts and bolts course which I believe should be required of every journalism major. I feel that it is impossible to work in a medium without understanding the mechanics.

There are two courses left to consider which both specifically concern advertising. All advertising majors must take the basic course called "Introduction to Advertising". This is a course designed to provide basic information on the theory and practice of advertising throughout the media. In all phases, however, the course attempts to relate advertising theory to actual practice. Intro to Advertising does not require students to write copy or execute layout. All the students, though, are grounded in design theory since VisCom is a prerequisite. This allows for the presentation of visual material of an advanced nature and the analysis of this material by students. Again, it is more of an attempt to develop taste than it is to develop skill. I believe that the basic principles of advertising are difficult enough in themselves for the students to grasp and that they should not be confused by being required to perform physical tasks for which they are not equipped. This might be possible if Publication Produc-

tion and Design were a prerequisite, but then we would probably also have to include television and radio production on that list and it would become too difficult to run the course. Hopefully students will elect at least one of these skills courses later.

There is, however, an acid test for those students who are interested in print advertising. That test is "Advertising Copywriting: Print", a course which requires multiple skills in advertising, writing, and design. This is planned as a practical course in writing and visualizing advertising copy for the print media. The theoretical aspects of advertising and copywriting are explored in lectures and reading. The lectures also cover criticism of current print advertising. Practical experience is gained for the student in regular copywriting and layout exercises which are evaluated and criticized in laboratory sessions. Additional critical remarks are supplied to students by the instructor on audio cassettes.

The theory of copywriting that is taught is that the copywriter must visualize his advertising vehicle before he writes the first word. In other words, illustrations, design, typography, and copy are treated as one. This is based on the premise that truly effective advertising comes only from fully integrated work. In what is a true exercise in masochism, each student must produce fourteen completed advertisements ranging through the consumer, retail, business and industrial, and outdoor advertising fields. This is where the theory of the original courses finally melds with the practicality discussed by the other two presenters.

The final dose of practicality is a portfolio of the copy exercises which counts for 50% of the course grade. This means that all of the students' original work must be rethought and re-executed, something, even with all my optimism and love of my students, I do not believe they would do on their own (or at least not many of them). The portfolio must demonstrate enough quality so that it could be used by the student in applying for a job in the field of advertising. The grading, incidentally, was tough even before the administration started sending those grade inflation memos.

At this point I seem to have run full circle with the two previous speakers. I have started with a lot of theory and have spoken of the development of taste, but ultimately I have forced the students to show that they can put the theory to practical use. You might now reasonably ask if this approach is successful. I can hedge, of course, by saying that success is difficult to measure under most circumstances. However, as a teacher in a journalism school, I am held accountable by my superiors for demonstrating results. While learning for the sake of knowledge is in the best tradition of liberal arts education, we in journalism schools still must measure in terms of jobs. In my five years of teaching, I have had quite a number of students enter the field of advertising. All those who were qualified for the jobs for which they applied are now doing well. (I hedged this statement only to protect myself from having to account for two students who were so termanally dense that they applied for jobs that were well beyond their capabilities.) In fact, one of my 1973 graduates now makes more than I do (a situation which William Bendix would have described as a "revoltin' development".)

Competent students in the field of advertising are actively sought on the job market and I believe that the program at my university is able to supply the market.

I do not claim that my approach is the only potentially successful one which can be taken in teaching graphics and design in relationship to advertising. To a great extent teaching methods must be tied to the individual capabilities of the instructors. This four staged approach is one which has worked for me and has proven itself over a span of years. I believe that it is viable and can work just as well in other locations.